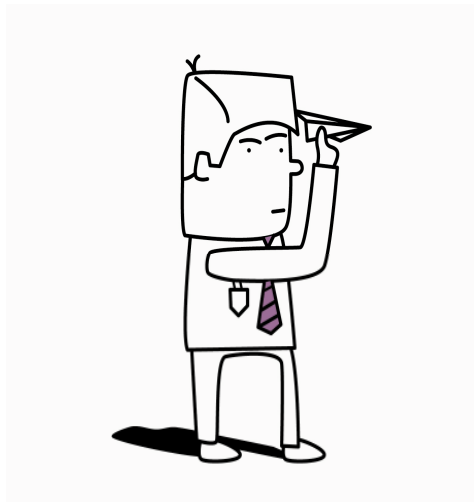


Needs-Focused *Interventions*

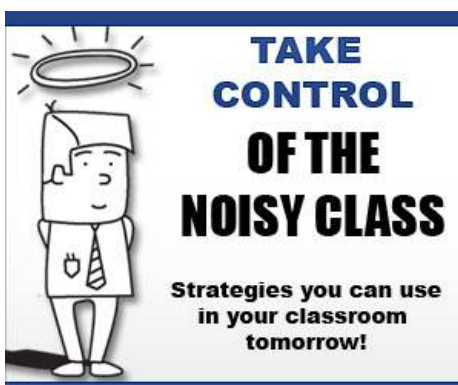
Proactive Responses for Seven Common Classroom Problems



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Behaviour: Defiance

Observed

Talks back/laughs at teacher.
Appears unaffected by what teacher says or does-
Claims teacher is unfair
Has poor relationships with peers
Often emotional with little self control
Blames others

Causes/Reasons

Interactions with other people are very negative therefore student feels frustrated.
Low self esteem has made him try to get attention and assert himself defiantly in an unacceptable way.
This student wants to be disliked to reinforce negative self view.
The student is trying to satisfy the needs for power and belonging therefore appropriate methods of doing so need to be presented.

Action

Do:

Remain detached. Remember, their defiance-(unless you are shouting/arguing or using sarcasm) is NOT aimed at you so try not to take it personally. By remaining disconnected you can offer help without risking saying or doing something that will only aggravate the situation. Simply ask *"What's wrong?"* or *"What can I do to help?"*

Pause. If they say something to get a reaction from you just say nothing and just look at them. Say "I don't think I heard you" rather than "What did you just say to me?" so as to give the student a chance to retract the statement or to apologise without you having to confront them again. Asking them what they just said is like holding a red rag to a bull – it gives them the perfect opportunity to repeat whatever was aimed at you in the first place.

Remove audience pressure. Some students will try to escalate the incident in front of peers. If possible speak to the student privately or redirect them so as to deal with the problem later... *"Let's not talk about it here. Let's meet later so that you can tell me everything that's bothering you."*

Be caring, but be honest. Tell them exactly what they have done that is causing problems then be sure to listen to the student as well and don't interrupt until he/she finishes.. In the process, insist upon one rule - that you are both respectful to each other.

Give them a classroom responsibility. Putting them in charge of equipment or giving them a task such as keeping other students settled will meet their need for Power.

Give them opportunity to succeed. Tasks which are pitched to their interests and ability level give them the opportunity to experience success and raise their self esteem.

Acknowledge their achievements. Let them know you recognise any improvements by giving them sincere, private praise.

Encourage and facilitate cooperative group work. Positive relationships between peers (and staff) need to be established and developed.

Don't:

Regardless of the situation, never get into a *"You will do as I say!"* power struggle with this student. Silence is a better response.

Raise your voice, issue threats or give ultimatums – these are guaranteed to antagonise the student.

Behaviour: Making silly noises

Observed

Makes noises in the classroom such as humming, tapping the desk, whistling etc. Pretends he is not the cause when asked to stop.
Gives the impression he is purposely trying to annoy the teacher.

Causes/Reasons

Low self esteem has made him try to get attention in an unacceptable way.
May be bored
Avoidance tactic – fear of failure
The student is trying to satisfy the needs for power and belonging therefore appropriate methods of doing so need to be presented.

Action

Do:

Plan to deal proactively with persistent offenders. Remember that one of the most likely reasons for this type of behaviour is needing attention; the other is work-related – either boredom or fear of failure. These factors can be reduced through careful planning – alternative, more appropriate tasks can be made available and attention needs can be met through suitable seating. Include the student in these plans – let them see you are trying to help them rather than punish them.

Use a seating plan. Seat the student close to you - where you can keep an eye on him/her – and away from other students who are likely to join in or encourage misbehaviour.

Explain the effect of the behaviour. Make sure the student is aware that their behaviour impairs other students' ability to function. Use direct questions: "Do you know what you are doing?" "Do you realise how your classmates feel?" "What can I do to help you?" Questions like these will help the student to empathise and see that they are affecting others.

Reinforce positive behaviour. Be attentive and vigilant – ready to 'catch them being good' and praise them (as well as others) as soon as they make the smallest improvement.

Use non-verbal signals. Intervention should always be less disruptive than the behaviour being addressed in order to prevent escalation so start with non-verbal signals. With some students it can be beneficial and empowering to pre-arrange signals so that they become a 'private dialogue.' *"Paul, I don't want to have to have a go at you all the time so how about we have a code that only you and I know about? Whenever you see this signal it's reminder that you're making silly noises and is time to stop."*

Involve them in tasks. Involvement in class activities can lead to positive recognition from peers and adults and will reduce the noise-making. Have appropriate activities to hand and group students accordingly.

Don't:

Make the mistake of trying to 'tactically ignore' the noises only to react to them later. This trains the student to 'push a little harder' in order to get your attention next time.
Over-react and end up being hostile and making threats.

Behaviour: Abusive language

Observed

Loud, offensive, abusive to others in group situations yet often polite on 1:1 basis
Can't accept criticism from others
Attempts to shock staff and impress peers
Likes to appear 'streetwise'
Doesn't form relationships with peers.

Causes/Reasons

A need for status and attention
Lack of social skills – inability to control temper
May be a way of covering up inadequacies in group situations
The student is trying to satisfy the needs for power and belonging therefore appropriate methods of doing so need to be presented.

Action

Do:

Take a long term approach – plan to teach appropriate means of dealing with anger and controlling aggression as well as other means of attaining status and asserting oneself. Involve the student in deciding appropriate language for various situations and circumstances.

Remain calm and remind them that inappropriate language won't be tolerated. Try not to give them the reaction they are looking for. Instead, calmly say *"we don't use that language here. If you want my attention speak to me without being abusive."*

Relate the problem to the outside world. Explain that in a restaurant, (with their girlfriend/boyfriend), in a cinema or in any public place, the language won't be tolerated and they will be asked to leave. If possible take them to public places and congratulate them when they refrain from using foul language. Refer back to this experience... *"You were a pleasure to be with when we went on the trip. Can we get back to that type of language please? You were much nicer company."*

Remind the student that you want to help. Say, *"I don't want people thinking bad of you. Let's find a way round your need to speak in this way"*

Give little attention to the language. Just say *"I'm sorry you must use such language,"* and go on with the conversation/lesson. It's important to show your displeasure, but also your ability to stay on target in the conversation. This deprives the student of personal attention for his/her foul mouth, but shows your willingness to give attention to the area of importance.

Remember the student may well feel inadequate or inferior without the protective wall of a foul mouth. Therefore, don't respond in anger but try to remain supportive.

Don't:

Ignore foul language – it must be challenged but in a non-confrontational way.
Use condescending, patronising or sarcastic responses.
Spend time lecturing, preaching and cajoling.

Behaviour: Refusal to work

Observed

Draws, daydreams, and uses a variety of tactics to avoid work.

Frequently out of seat, wandering round the room.

Fails to bring equipment to class

Short attention span

Causes/Reasons

Has few positive lesson experiences/successes to draw on
Lack of self worth makes it difficult to put in required effort to improve oneself *'what's the use?'*

General lack of interest in school due to consistent failures
Doesn't feel connected to the rest of the group/class

Action

Do:

Put contracts in place – Create a verbal or written agreement with 'small steps' to help create a sense of real progress and self-motivation

Get parents on board – Call parents in to explain the situation and agree an action plan with coordination between home and school. Make regular, frequent telephone calls home to inform parents of progress (preferably each day). Send letters/notes home when good progress has been made.

Organise the lesson – Enable the student to work on one thing at a time clearly and directly. Small, 'chunked' tasks are more achievable.

Enlist help from support staff – A staff member who has a positive relationship with the student and can give them adequate support may provide the stepping-stone they need to experience their first successes. This student needs as much positive attention as possible.

Find and use their interests – Use these interests to create activities and tasks that will appeal to them and build relationships with them through dialogue about subjects they will enjoy talking about.

Have regular 1:1 time with them – show them that you care about them and won't give up on them. Set goals with them and monitor their progress.

Adjust work – speak to them in private and ask them if there is anything you can do to make the work more appealing.

Give them explicit instructions – make sure they know exactly what is expected of them by giving them very concise, clear instructions. *'Give them clear tracks to walk in and there's more chance of them staying on the path.'*

Don't:

Take the view that "they should just get on with it!" This student is vulnerable and that approach will not change their attitude towards work.

Nag them or lecture them – it will only serve to make them more negative.

Belittle them – particularly not in front of peers.

Behaviour: Disrespectful

Observed

Displays a total lack of courtesy towards staff
Frequently sneers, 'tuts', rolls eyes, mutters or gives looks of sheer disdain.
Totally ignores the teacher
Acts superior

Causes/Reasons

Often quite a fragile individual – behaviour can be a cover-up for frustration and unhappiness.

This student may have been hurt by peers or adults at home and/or school and is now hurting others as a form of revenge and power.

Action

Do:

Remember this student *can't* be changed with force. Fighting fire with more fire never works – it just leads to more arguments and more serious incidents. Remember also the student's anger is probably not personal – usually it is directed at adults and authority in general as a result of failing, being hurt or even being spoiled.

Make the student responsible for his/her actions. This is a very important aspect of dealing with disrespectful students. When we retaliate we reinforce their view that the adult world is against them – effectively letting him/her off the hook. Remain calm and remind them of the consequences of choosing to continue to behave in this way.

Remove the audience. A public confrontation may put the student on the spot and compel him/her to act even worse to save face *"Who do you think you are? I don't get pushed around by anyone!"* Whenever possible ask the student to follow you to another room such as the hall to talk the matter through in private. *"I'm not talking about this here in front of everyone; it won't look good for either of us."*

Keep your cool. Even though you may be deeply offended by the disrespectful behaviour try not to react as this will make the student feel justified. In addition, classmates will respect the teacher who maintains a professional manner and responds respectfully to an abusive student. Try taking the student aside, out of earshot of other students and calmly saying, *"Carly, I don't think I deserve to be spoken to like that. I can see you're upset, why don't you tell me what's really on your mind and maybe I can help."* This type of professional and caring response often results in an instant apology.

Deny them an enemy. Remember, disrespect is usually caused by hostility and revenge. Give the student nothing more to be hostile toward – offer nothing but support – and the situation can be quickly resolved.

Don't:

Use sarcastic comments, put-downs or ridicule them. You will almost certainly provoke the same behaviour from the students in return. 'Life is a mirror' – they will give you what you give them.

Lose control. Responding too quickly and too harshly can back them into a corner and cause them to retaliate further. Try not to let your initial response be too defensive, indignant, or attacking.

Behaviour: Silly class clown

Observed

Continually disrupts class with wisecracks and silly behaviour
Will do or say anything to be in the spotlight.
Doesn't know when to stop

Causes/Reasons

May be covering up deep rooted pain or anxiety – often very insecure and immature
Desperate to be liked and raise status
Sometimes these students have high self-esteem and simply love to entertain

Action

Do:

Meet their need for attention. This student is absolutely DESPERATE for attention. Meet this need by giving them attention when they are *not* messing around – show them that they can get attention with having to act the fool.

Arrange a time when they can be the comedian. Remember that this student is often very *funny*. This can be used to your advantage to help raise spirits in a group – laugh *with them* and enjoy the fun from time to time. However, the comedian also needs to know that there is an acceptable and unacceptable time to be a clown. Speak to them in private and offer them a chance to perform 'on stage' at the front of the room – at an *appropriate* time during a lesson. Often, the very fact that you've acknowledged them will be enough - they won't bother accepting the offer. *"Paul you've got a great personality but I can't have you disturbing the lesson. How about you entertain us for five minutes at a certain time in the lesson? One condition though, you must stop when I say so."*

Remind them how their behaviour will look to others. Speak to them in private and tell them you are concerned that some students are laughing *at them* rather than *with them*. Tell them that it is just their behaviour that is causing this and that there are positive ways they can use their talent rather than going too far and appearing silly. *"Simon, you're a very funny lad but sometimes you go too far. Some people may lose respect for you if you act too silly. If I give you this signal it's time to stop so that you don't make a fool of yourself - ok?"*

Make time for this student. Take the time to build a relationship with this student by showing interest in them. They will come to respect the teacher who values them.

Respond with silence. When silly behaviour interrupts the class, use the power of silence to convey how you feel. A serious expression and total silence gives the clear message that the behaviour is immature and unacceptable.

Separate them from their audience. Move the student to the front of the room but be quick to give them the attention they need as soon as they start to behave appropriately.

Don't:

Belittle them – particularly not in front of peers – their esteem is already likely to be very low.

Behaviour: Interrupting

Observed

Shouting out

Making silly or rude comments

Trying to engage the teacher in off-topic conversations

Generally ignoring the teacher and talking over him/her

Causes/Reasons

Sees disrupting the lesson as a way of gaining status – the student is trying to get attention and acceptance from peers

The student is trying to satisfy the needs for power and belonging therefore appropriate methods of doing so need to be presented.

Action

Do:

Include cooperative group work activities in lessons – allow the student to make connections with peers and give opportunities to practice appropriate social behaviour.

Give them a responsibility – Doing so enables them to assert themselves and meet their need for empowerment appropriately.

Don't allow them to disrupt the lesson flow - Continue teaching and try to maintain flow by using proximity praise – giving positive attention to students who are listening and taking part – getting up close to the student and using frequent questioning. Try to keep explanations to a minimum. Confront the student only if the behaviour actually stops the flow of the lesson. At this point calmly remind them that they have caused the lesson to stop. *"People can't learn when you interrupt us. Let's stay on topic."* If it continues use a hierarchy of consequences.

Give adequate opportunities for expressing ideas and reporting back – After all, why do pupils talk out of turn? Often because they don't think they will get a turn.

Speak to persistent interrupters in private at the earliest possible time - Tell them the effect their behaviour is having on the group and calmly but firmly tell them you will not allow this to happen. *"My job is to help you all learn. If another student was stopping you learning I would do something about it. This is a serious matter, I want you ALL to succeed and your behavior is preventing this."*

Look for any improvement – no matter how small - Give positive feedback in private to the student.

Request help from parents. - Explain that if this behaviour continues, it will be difficult for you to teach and it is likely that classmates will withdraw socially from the student.

Pre-arrange an eye or hand signal - Help the student to recognise the unacceptable behaviour without involving the rest of the group.

Don't:

Neglect the opportunity to teach good social skills – let them see that this behaviour may alienate them in future.

Give undue attention to their interruptions – it will encourage a repeat performance

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